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ABSTRACT

In a 1968 address, Franklyn S. Haiman stated that public discourse at that time was marked by irrationality because of emphases on emotional appeals, disorganization, and aggressive or abusive style and language. He also cited "body rhetoric" (lawful protests or marches) and civil disobedience (illegal actions) as examples of irrational arguments. Haiman's statement on emotional appeals suggests a logic-emotion dichotomy, with reason and emotion at opposite ends of a continuum. However, logical argument and emotional appeal are, in fact, independent dimensions, and both must be considered for a comprehensive evaluation of argumentative proof. Organization, style, and language usage are not related to methods of reasoning or rationality, Also, body rhetoric or civil disobedience (forms of nonverbal communication) are necessarily limited in presentation of proof, but the arguments they support are not necessarily irrational in themselves. Rational arguments are those that have sound, logical support for their claims, regardless of the verbal or nonverbal methods of presentation. (RN)

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ARGUMENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY RHETORIC: A RESPONSE TO HAIMAN'S "FAREWELL TO RATIONAL DISCOURSE"

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ARGUMENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY RHETORIC: A RESPONSE TO HAIMAN'S "FAREWELL TO RATIONAL DISCOURSE"

During the 1968 Symposium on Issues in Public Communication Franklyn S. Haiman presented an address entitled "The Rhetoric of 1968: A Farewell to Rational Discourse." Haiman proposed that the irrationality of 1968 discourse is manifested in three characteristics: "the emotionalization of verbal discourse, the increase in body rhetoric, and the uses of civil disobedience."[1] This position has been echoed by others doubting or even denying the importance of argument in persuasive discourse, and the Haiman speech has been reprinted in several texts.[2] The purpose of this paper is to analyze Professor Haiman's indictments of rational discourse.

Initially, some qualifications concerning Haiman's position should be noted. First, the title, "A Farewell to Rational Discourse," is an overstatement recognized by Haiman's admission that it is "an over-dramatized expression of feelings rather than a literal statement of fact." Second, Haiman expresses doubts that 1968 is in fact the nadir of rational discourse but indicates his willingness to argue that position.

Haiman's reservations are well-founded for two reasons. First, the examples of speeches selected as support are a limited and asystematic sampling of personal observations--far too restricted an array of contemporary discourse on political and social issues to generalize basic characteristics of 1968 rhetoric. Second, Haiman makes no comparison or contrast to

previous eras. It is difficult to demonstrate the downfall of rational discourse in 1968 by discussing only that year: how are we to know it was different from the past?

The main thrust of this paper, however, is not to examine how well Haiman describes the characteristics of 1968 discourse. It is, instead, to analyze the validity of those characteristics as indices of rational communication. It is the authors' position that the death-knell has not been sounded for argument--not because Haiman's features do not necessarily characterize contemporary rhetoric--but because those characteristics have virtually nothing to do with rationalism.

The first of three characteristics delineated is the emotionalization of verbal discourse. Haiman is confusing in his differentiation between logic and emotion:

> "On this business of emotionality and irrationality, I do not believe, and am sorry if I suggested in the speech that I think there is a complete dichotomy, that one cannot be rational and have feeling at the same time. I would put it on a kind of continuum, and it seems to me that the healthiest, most desirable kind of communication is that which combines strong feeling and clear logic. What concerns me--which I regard as less than ideal--is the movement toward the end of the continuum, which is emotionality to the exclusion of rational thinking, which I think sometimes occurs."[3]

Although Haiman disavows a logic-emotion dichotomy, conceptualizing a single continuum leads inescapably to such a dichotomization. With strong logic at one end and strong feeling at the other, the espoused ideal

of strong logic and strong feeling is physically impossible to locate on the continuum. Most important, an inverse relation between emotion and logic is clearly implicit in this view: as one moves toward the logical end of the continuum, one necessarily becomes less emotional; as one slips toward excessive emotion, rationalism is diminished. It is the authors' position that the incompatibility of emotion and logic is a myth.

The rational dimension of discourse, or the "logical mode of persuasion" as Aristotle described it, concerns argumentation. To paraphrase one argumentation text's definition, an argument is the presentation of a statement or statements designed to authorize the acceptance of another statement.[4] The logical dimension of speech--i. e. argumentation--is concerned both with truth (how well does a statement's content describe reality) and validity (does the form of the argument necessitate acceptance of the conclusion if one accepts its premises). To judge rationality, one must assess the truth and validity of an appeal, but this says nothing about its emotionality.

The emotional element in discourse concerns the degree to which an appeal arouses audience values and motives (duty, honor, power, reputation) or emotions (fear, anger, pity). Such arousal is, of course, a function of the concepts discussed and particularly the verbal form selected for expressing the concept. The more connotative the language,

the more likely a greater degree of affective response will be elicited. The extent to which an audience is angered, frightened, delighted, etc. tells one nothing about the truth and validity of the appeals employed.

A conceptualization of the logical-emotional relationship more accurate than Haiman's continuum would feature a horizontal and vertical axis representing the logical and emotional dimensions. A particular appeal may, of course, be in either the irrational-emotional or rational-unemotional quadrant, but nothing precludes an appeal from being both irrational and unemotional or from being highly rational and emotional (which Haiman rightly urges for most communicators in most situations). To require an appeal to be either logical or emotional is like expecting a man to be tall or fat, but not both. Just as height and weight are independent dimensions, so too are logical argument and emotional appeal.

Consequently, Haiman's indictments of emotionality in 1968 rhetoric say nothing about the soundness of the arguments contained therein. An examination of Haiman's specifics further reveals their irrelevance to rationality in discourse. In describing the increase of emotionality, Haiman discusses invention, arrangement, and style and delivery. With regard to invention, he notes an emphasis on "polarization of issues, oversimplification and overgeneralizing, sloganizing, etc." While oversimplification and overgeneralizing are indictments of argumentative soundness, sloganeering and polarization per se are not. Haiman

states that "doves talk easily of civil war in Vietnam, corruption in Saigon, the napalming of innocent civilians, defoliation of forests and unilateral withdrawal. . . ." Many responsible citizens argued these positions with great merit. It is unclear why these arguments are necessarily illogical just because they are polarized with rightist views. Sloganeering also should not be equated with faulty logic. A man shouting, "Down with Thieu," depending on the audience may be engaging in sound enthymematic reasoning. The audience supplies the major premise, "Petty dictators should be deposed," and the minor premise, "Thieu is a petty dictator." The conclusion, hence, is "Thieu should be deposed." Haiman may wish to protest slogans because their premises are not stated; this, however, does not affect their rationality.

The second reason Haiman believes verbal discourse less rational is its "unmistakeable shift, from what we have traditionally regarded to be 'proper' modes for the arrangement of verbal discourse to formless or stream-of-consciousness patterns." He laments the disappearance of "the familiar introduction, body, and conclusion; the statement and partition of issues; internal summaries; topical, spatial, chronological or any other particular kind of order." Lack of textbook organization in political speeches is hardly unique to 1968. James F. Vickrey, Jr., analyzing 46 presidential inaugural addresses, found only seven that had an introduction, body, and conclusion; only seven had a general preview

and review; only two enumerated the points to be covered; most had few transitional devices; and only three used numerical signposts.[5] The most significant speeches did not follow prescribed rules of organization. Haiman's real complaint, then, is not of irrational discourse but disorganized discourse. He relates how, when listening to a speech by James Bevel, an associate of Martin Luther King, Jr., he looked for a "pattern, for partitions, for points with supporting proofs." Only after abandoning his traditional "filters for what I hear [did] Mr. Bevel . . . [begin] to make sense." Rationality is independent of speech organization or listener comprehension.

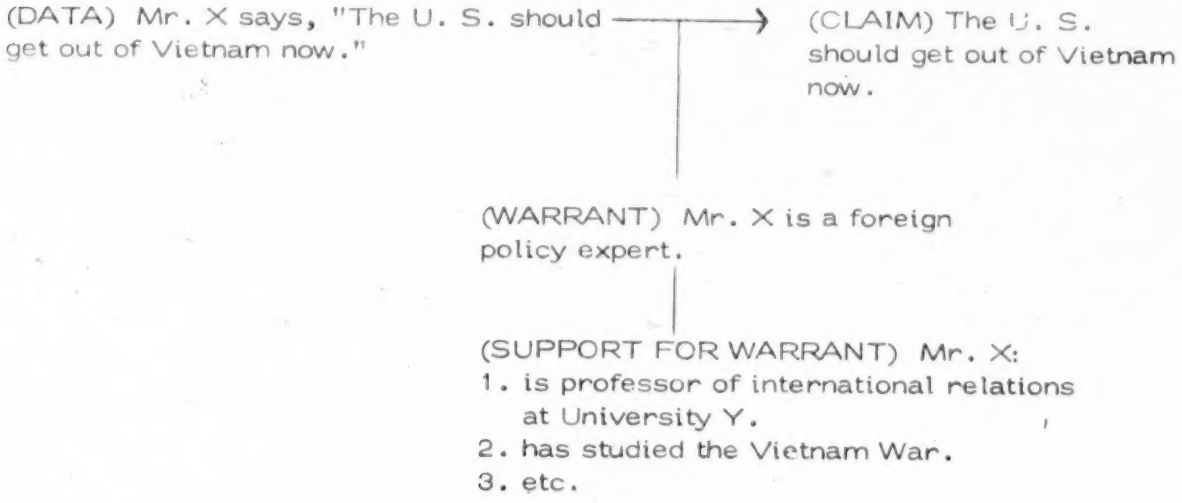
In addition to invention and arrangement, Haiman contends that style and delivery have become emotionalized. It is "aggressive, abrasive, nonconciliatory, even shocking, and apparently unconcerned with making adaptations to the mores or sensitivities of its audience." He complains that opponents are labelled enemies, the misinformed are called liars, the prejudiced are racists, whites are honkies, those who oppose the establishment are anarchists, and four-letter words abound. Because rhetoric is aggressive and abrasive does not deny its rationality. In fact, in some political campaigns more shocking statements might be appropriate. Russell Baker satirically notes that American reporters "almost invariably write in an idiom of praise."[6] If a newsman describes a senator as "'widely respected as a wily political operative with a genius for keeping

his opponent off balance' . . . this means, 'Nobody can believe a word the rascal says.'" Saying that President Nixon lied to the American people about some Watergate specifics is not less rational than saying that situational alterations have made previous statements inoperative. McGovern's campaign charge that the Nixon administration was the most corrupt in the nation's history is less shocking today than it was in October 1972.

Professor Haiman's second and third characteristics of 1968 discourse are body rhetoric and civil disobedience. These forms of nonverbal communication "are strategies of persuasion which, instead of relying on facts and logic to demonstrate the validity of a point of view, rely on the expression of strong feeling." Body rhetoric involves lawful activities such as protest marches and sit-ins. Civil disobedience is illegal. Haiman excludes from the latter category "rioting, looting, and burning" but includes "open defiance of laws against the sale and use of marijuana, or the non-destructive seizures of a university building by dissident students, or refusals to register for the draft . . . ."

Professor Haiman assumes that messages conveyed through body rhetoric and civil disobedience are at best non-rational and probably irrational. Such an assumption is faulty. Douglas Ehninger and Wayne Brockriede classify three types of proof: substantive, authoritative, and

motivational.[7] Nonverbal communication is often a type of authoritative proof. Consider the following authoritative argument structured according to the Toulmin model:



The warrant determines the acceptability of the conclusion. In authoritative proof the warrant always asserts that the claim should be believed because the source is credible. The support for warrant establishes that credibility. When the public views a protest march against the Vietnam War, the data--expressed by signs, chants, or simply presence--are the protesters demanding an end to United States involvement. The conclusion is "The United States should get out of Vietnam." The warrant is that the protesters are credible concerning proper war policy. The public evaluates the credibility of the protesters by their number, their knowledge of the subject, their attire, their social status, their behavior, etc. A verbal

statement by a professor of international relations that our Indochina involvement should cease is no more rational than his nonverbal st -ment of that belief. Nonverbal communication is necessarily limited in its presentation of proof, but the fact that it is nonverbal should not necessarily warrant its denotation as irrational. Just as a slogan may imply an argument, so too may a nonverbal message. Consider the anti-Nixon poster embellishing Nixon's portrait with Hitleresque bangs and mustache. Isn't the analogical reasoning being offered in as clear a form as any verbal expression of the argument? What is vital to assessing rationality is whether sound reasons for the claim are offered, whether verbalized or not.

In conclusion, if the Haiman address examined a broad spectrum of contemporary discourse and contrasted it to the past, demonstrating that emotionality (including sloganeering, disorganization, abrasive language) and body rhetoric were on the increase, the relevance of argumentation to contemporary rhetoric would not be diminished. Let us not bid farewell to rational discourse, but let us better understand what rational discourse is.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Franklyn S. Haiman, "The Rhetoric of 1968: A Farewell to Rational Discourse," in The Ethics of Controversy: Politics and Protest, Proceedings of the First Annual Symposium on Issues in Public Communication, ed. by Donn W. Parson and Wil A. Linkugel (House of Usher, 1968), pp. 123-142. All subsequent references to Haiman's address are from this source.

[2]See, for example: Wil A. Linkugel, R. R. Allen, and Richard L. Johannesen, Contemporary American Speeches (Belmont, California. 1972), pp. 133-147; Robert C. Jeffrey and Owen Peterson, Speech: A Text with Adapted Readings (New York, 1971), pp. 184-185.

[3]Haiman, "Discussion Period," p. 145.

[4]Walter R. Fisher and Edward M. Sayles, "The Nature and Functions of Argument," in Perspectives on Argumentation, ed. by Gerald R. Miller and Thomas R. Nilsen (Chicago, 1966), p. 3.

[5]James F. Vickrey, Jr., "Inaugural Rhetoric and Rhetorical Prescription--An Examination of Organizational Patterns in Presidential Inaugural Addresses," Paper presented at the 58th Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Palmer House, Chicago, December 27-30, 1972.

[6]Russell Baker, "Praising Every Caesar," New York Times, January 16, 1972, p. E15.

[7]Douglas Ehninger and Wayne Brockriede, Decision by Debate (New York, 1963), pp. 125--167.